

COLLIN COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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2012 FORCES

INTEGRITY FIRST SERVICE BEFORE SELF EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO
THIS WE WILL DEFEND
ALWAYS FAITHFUL
HONOR COURAGE COMMITMENT
ALWAYS READY



2012 FORCES

FORCES offered a call for military submissions with this issue in deep respect for the service and sacrifice of all soldiers, past and present, and their families. We weren't certain what the response would be. While we did receive a fair amount of military submissions, the number was fewer than we had hoped to fill an entire issue. My suspicion is that war, service, returning home, and readjusting to civilian life, it appears, is difficult to talk about, difficult to write about. I am reminded, sometimes in life that words cannot take a person to the same place or explain the inexplicable; sometimes, "You just have to have been there." It's like trying to explain love between two human beings: holding hands can say more than any dissertation, a locking of eyes can make the mouth mute when there is nothing more to say. Therefore, we let the journal be woven with traditional submissions and stitched together with various military moments to create in form and in content a piece that is indicative of the country the veterans left to defend and a reminder to all of us what it is exactly they return to - a country of freedom, of responsibility, of honor, of grace, of one voice with many faces.

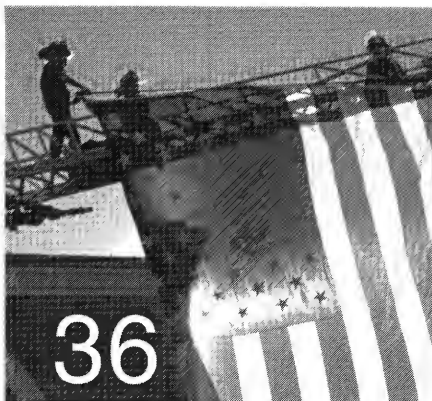
Assisting in selection and editing this year are two talented writers, Taurean Hill, the current Collin College Student Editor of *FORCES* and Amy Holt, former Collin College creative writing student and current SMU creative writing major.

R. Scott Yarbrough
 Editor of *FORCES Literary Journal*

SCC

INTEGRITY FIRST SERVICE BEFORE SELF EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO
 THIS WE WILL DEFEND
 ALWAYS FAITHFUL
 HONOR COURAGE COMMITMENT
 ALWAYS LEAD

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★ VETERAN



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The Reason I Write

SHARON ORSBURN

My son, John, died on May 5, 2007. Or so it says on the plaque marking his remains at the National Cemetery in Dallas, Texas. The truth is that he died on a battlefield in Iraq in 2004. It could be said that his spirit was mortally wounded then and his body came home, without a scratch, to die.

Since then I have come in contact with so many parents who have buried their children. And one thing is certain: this loss binds us together in a powerful way. It seems to make no difference whether the child is a senior citizen whose parents have outlived them, or a stillborn child who never got to take a breath, the loss is monumental. As one dear friend put it, "The death of my son is the defining moment in my life."

John was a victim of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. And I believe PTSD deaths take this powerful grief to an even more horrific level. Our children served their country and came home to us broken and haunted by the very incidents for which they had been decorated.

Something surprising happened to me almost immediately upon finding out that John was dead. I began writing what some have graciously called poetry. I had always written a little but this event threw open the flood gates to a whole new type of writing.

On the day I went to the coroner's office to hear the words that changed my life forever I came home and composed a piece that I would read at my child's funeral. I'm sure I was in shock, but I calmly stood up and looked into the tear stained faces of the people who loved him and read an ode that I had just penned for him.

The poems have continued to come to me. Most of them have been about grief and healing. I have noticed that as time goes by they have become lighter...an indication of my own healing for which I am grateful.

So, I have come to believe that the poems are given to me so that I may heal. I hope that as you read my offerings you find some sort of healing, too.

In a recent note to a mother whose young veteran son stepped in front of a train just hours after being released from a VA Hospital I said:

"I will continue to stand at this end of our mutual path and encourage you to take one small step at a time until there is some degree of peace in your broken heart."

That is my hope for all who grieve.



CEMETERY, FT. ABRAHAM, LINCOLN ND J. ALLEN WHITESIDE



Unprepared

SHARON ORSBORN

Our soldier boy came home to us. He'd had a lucky charm!
He been to war and back again and wasn't even harmed.
The first few days were wonderful, we gathered and laughed and ate.
There were reunions with friends and family; everything was great.

But that didn't last for very long; he was different now.
And it wasn't easy to explain just exactly how.
We'd ask him to tell about what he'd seen and the things he'd done.
But he wouldn't speak about what he did while he wore the Big Red One.

He'd say, "They told us not to tell you; civilians can't understand."
We tried our best to change his mind; we wanted to hold his hand.
Nothing seemed to interest him, not a job or school or fun.
It was almost like he was finished; somehow his life was done.

One second he'd be happy enough and then without a warning
he was sad and sullen; perhaps the soldier was mourning.
Then he'd go to an angry place that we didn't understand.
And we began to realize that we didn't know this man.

What the hell were we dealing with? We didn't have a clue!
The soldier that came back was hardly the person we knew.
No one prepared us to get our boy back with a soul that had been shattered.
They processed him out. Sign this! Sign that! Was that all that really mattered?

Someone should have said to us, "Because of this awful war,
here's a list of all the things you should be looking for."
And if and when you see these things (on the list we sent to you)
here are the ways you can help; here's exactly what to do.

But that wasn't done; so unprepared we tried to figure out what to do.
And just like that, in the blink of an eye, the whole ordeal was through.

But it wasn't really over, our ordeal had just begun.
For reasons we didn't understand we lost our precious son.
His sisters lost their little brother, the one they helped to raise.
When asked about our soldier we say, "Our boy is in the grave."

Going To Graves

DAVID KNAPE

We go to graves to see the names
Upon the tombstones chiseled plain
To find the loved ones who we must
Fondly remember, a part of us

We go to graves to kneel at plots
Remembering things so soon forgot
We bow our heads and say a prayer
So many memories buried there

We go to graves to bend a knee
To see the photos of deceased
So young and vibrant they once were
Their likeness cause hearts to stir

We go to graves to say amen
To all the things remembered when
There was such joy in family, friends
Those times will never come again

We go to graves to tell our folks
The love we had but seldom spoke
And that we miss them more than we
Could ever say, quite honestly

We go to graves, down rows we walk
To find forebears, if stones could talk
What stories we would hear from them
Their voices echo in the wind

We go to graves to feel the sense
Of being with them, once again
Of having one more memory
Kept in our hearts eternally

We go to graves to find the thing
That's missing in the lives we lead
And in the end, if truth we tell
We go to graves to find ourselves.

SEPTEMBER 11 TEN YEAR #38 NICK YOUNG



The Path of the Plummet

HALEY WALLACE

A silent doe
falls
by a murmuring stream.
Her blood flows
gently
into the warm, tall grass.
She shallowly gasps for air as her
wide
panicked
eyes begin to soften.
She gives in to the
calm
that is awaiting her.
She sees her fawn
in the edge of the clearing.
“Be silent,”
she says.

“Do not weep for the lost, for
found are we in the field that
awaits.”
Her eyes
close.
Her breath
gone.
The Huntress approaches and
weeps
for the swollen belly of her prey.
In vanity and senselessness we
take
life.
Through necessity we do the
ill.



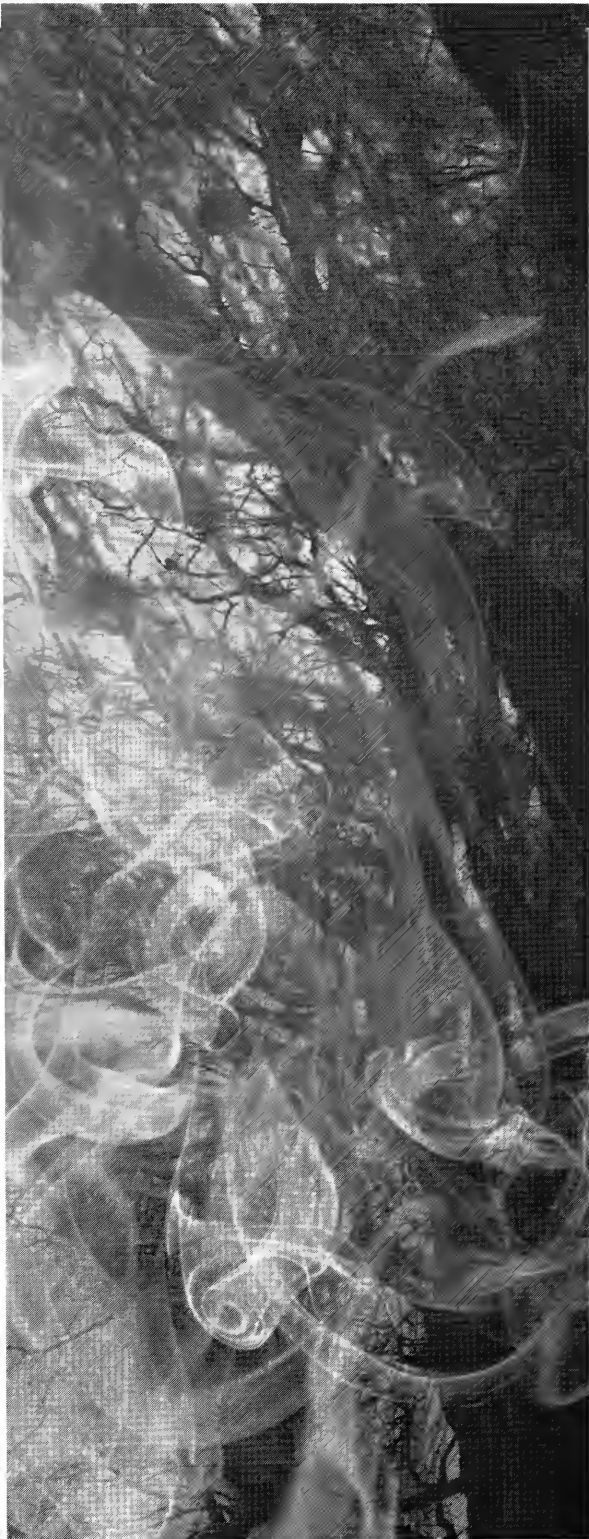
Antichrist Oils

KATIE LIPSCOMB

Dark matter engulfs an event you'll forget.
Light dancing on a hoof about to commit,
A saint lying drunk on immanent floors.
Accepting death in everyday shadows.

There is nothing more.





THE FORBIDDEN PATH FAIZAH

My Father

KATHY GRISBY

When I was a child I lived on a farm. I grew up with seven sisters and two brothers. There was always something to do, or to get into. Our house had three bedrooms, one bathroom, a living room and a big kitchen. We had all kinds of trees surrounding our house. There were apricot trees, peach trees, plum trees and pine trees. In the spring when all the trees were blooming, it smelled like several different kinds of perfume.

Although the spring and summer were beautiful, winter was horrible. When it snowed, the dirt roads would become impassable. As nightfall came, the melted snow turned to ice; most winter days the school bus did not run. The one station wagon we had would not start: therefore, we had to miss school. The only good thing about snow was mama's homemade ice cream. She would make it from snow, evaporated milk, sugar, and vanilla extract. To us, it was better than store bought ice cream.

I remember one year it snowed for three days straight. The snow was about two feet deep. We had no way of getting to town to buy food, and we didn't have a phone to call anyone, even if we did, there was no way anyone could get through the

Walking Softly

DAVID KNAPE

When walking
the woods
all the hardness
comes off
there are no
straight lines or
sharp edges
only ovals and
rounded shapes
the curl of leaves
round trunks of trees
the smoothness of
rain washed rocks
the softness of sands
the curve of a creek
a gentleness of light
filtered through trees
that lets you see
all hardness
going away
see where
softness is.

snow covered roads. As we listened to the radio that day, the forecaster said there would be at least six more inches of snow overnight. That night we went to bed and prayed that the sun would be shining when we got up the next morning.

The next morning we woke up to find icicles hanging from the roof of our house. Some of them were as long as baseball bats. I opened the door to try to grab one. It was too big for me to hold, so I dropped it and it shattered into tiny pieces. When my mother heard it hit the porch, she came running into the living room to see what had happened. She told me to get away from the door before I caught the 'Pneumonia.'

My mother started cooking breakfast. She was cooking rice and eggs. I sat there watching her as she cooked and sang old black spirituals. She was singing my favorite one called, "By the Grace of the Lord." My mother always sang while she was cooking. It made me feel happy just to sit and watch her cook. To me, my mom was the best cook in the world.

As the day went on, the snow continued to fall. We all played games inside the house in order not to get bored. When it was time for lunch, we had pork meat from a can, and beans and cornbread. After lunch, we watched television for several hours. I got a pillow and a cover then laid on the floor. Shortly after that I fell asleep. It seemed like only a few minutes later my sister woke me up and said it was time for supper. We had leftovers from lunch, and then we got ready for bed.

Again we prayed for the sun to come out in the morning. When we got up the next morning, the snow was still coming down. My mother cooked scrambled eggs for breakfast. I noticed that our portions were smaller, but I did not say anything.

Shortly after breakfast I saw my farther putting on his overalls. I thought that maybe he was going to take out the trash or something. He put on two jackets, a hat that had flaps to cover his ears, and his rubber boots he used to move irrigation pipes. I thought to myself that this was unusual for him to put on so many things to take the trash out to the trash can; the trash can was only five yards away.

I went running straight to my mom to ask her what was going on. She told me that my dad was going to walk to town to buy us some food. I felt like my heart skipped a beat. The nearest town was at least eight miles away, and five of that was dirt road. The snow was about two feet deep, and it was still snowing.

Tears started rolling down my face as I watched my dad get his gloves, a blanket, and his flashlight. I knew that my dad had made up his mind, and no amount of my crying was going to stop him. We all watched as he went out the door and across the fields. We watched until we couldn't see him anymore. As we watched television that day, everyone was silent. It was as if we were too afraid to speak. Sensing our fear, my mother began to sing spirituals. We all began to clap our hands and sing along with her. We took turns singing verses that we knew. The singing seemed to have washed away our fear.

We ate lunch very slowly that day because we did not have anything left to eat. One of my sisters complained that she was still hungry. My mother gave her the food that she had. As soon as lunch was over, we started to play little games. As soon as we started, we quit again because we kept thinking about our father. I kept thinking, what if he fell and froze to death in the snow. Then, I would try to wipe the negative thoughts out of my mind. I then began to wonder what kind of food he would bring back. I hoped that he would bring us some goodies.

**THAT NIGHT WE WENT TO BED AND PRAYED
THAT THE SUN WOULD BE SHINING
WHEN WE GOT UP THE NEXT MORNING.**

The hours passed and some of us were getting restless. We tried to keep ourselves entertained, but by now it was impossible. We began looking out the windows. The snow clouds were starting to break up. The sun was finally breaking through the clouds. The icicles started melting off of the house. We were almost blinded by the white snow and the bright sun.

In the distance I saw what looked like a person walking. Pretty soon the others said they saw it, too. As the person got closer, we saw that it was my father. He had two paper sacks, one in each hand. We all started jumping and screaming with joy. As my father entered the door, he was almost knocked down. He finally made it to the kitchen and sat the sacks on the table. He brought milk, cookies, chicken, potatoes, juice, peanut butter, jelly, rice and eggs. He even brought us some peppermint candy. We ate, and thanked God for my father's safe return.

Ever since that day I have a heartfelt admiration for my father. He has always put his children first. Still, to this day, he will do anything for any one of his ten kids. I think my father is the best father in the world.



INVISIBLE INJURIES

AMY CARTER-ISHMAEL

A Parting of Ways

WILLIAM VINCENT

Your mind is a room that smokes and burns,
And tears the upholstery that your mother owned.
With that dies the past, a taste thick and black,
and forgotten in the aftermath.

My word is a match that sets the spark,
And burns the brush, and signals the collapse.
Igniting the means, warring on your ends,
but both are forgotten in the aftermath.

Compass

JOAN CANBY

At thirteen years old I balanced astride my
3 speed Schwinn, stared towards the western
horizon where wild radishes, Indian paint
brush, lupine hid in carpets of yellow
mustard and red-tailed blackbirds flew
into the branches of Channel Island oaks.

Red smeared hashes of blood across his face
were still fresh from the night's fall when I
return home from school. Daddy took our
black Retriever, lifted her up, put a forepaw
into one of his cupped hands, pushed her,
prodded her into a dance across our oak floor.

I stared at my father -- afraid of the bourbon
on his breath, the scratch of his beard against my
cheek, I ignored his words -- "Honey, dance with
us," I leaned down on the living room floor, hugged
the books to my chest and waited for a new life.

Chumash Indians once gathered here, lovingly
laying Mariposa tulips and Shooting Star poppies
onto the eyelids of their dead before burying their bones
into the sacred meadows above the cliffs that
looked out to the sea. Today I will put an orchid
on his grave. I will set my compass for the meadow
where once I saw mustard, blackbirds and lupine
and face the evening's sunset and I'll dance for him.

Tunneling

JOAN CANBY

Below our hill, beside the gravel path up to kitchen
and hearth, our fruit orchard of cherry, apricot, loquat,
plum and apple trees greeted my sister and me as we
waited for the call to dinner, to return home and to sleep.
The spring grass that year reached to the middle of the
trunks of the trees and rose up to our shoulders.

When we kneeled down, into the moist softness of its
blades we were covered, not to be seen by one another,
and totally submerged. My sister was the first to begin:
relentless she crawled, made her tracks and then I
followed her. Like rodents, gophers under black earth,
or red ants in their mounds, we created new underworlds.
As we crawled, hands on the ground, knees propelling us
through the sweet smelling grass, we created new paths
with high green walls. We each made our own maze.
We remade the orchard into our own green puzzles.

After the bulldozing of the trees, after the marriages,
after the funerals, we were still waiting, still
making tunnels, still deep in the mazes of our lives.

Once Upon A Time

HALEY WALLACE

You can tell that she's
used to carrying a child on
her hip by the way she carries
her books to fourth period English.

Circles under her eyes mirror
pitch black hallways at
3AM, when nightmare cries interrupt
dreams of a supposed-to-be future.

She drifts through seas of rumors
spit by a jury who will never understand,
because time doesn't stop
to wipe your tears.



DRY BRANCH AVA EVERETTE

★
★
★
★
★

Two At the River Lethe

KELSEY JOHNSON

I remember the floor
of the back room: black-speckled,
off-white, linoleum.

That day it was dusty,
sticky with spilled soda
and peppered with plastic.

"I leave in four days."

Four hours ago
he hadn't been sure.

I remember triple checking
a pink cell phone, relief-giddy
toes tracing red brick.

Garrett's laugh always sounded
like a bear hug. His eyes turned
green when he smiled.

There's a solemn-faced soldier
on thousands of postcards,
posters and billboards.

The text reads "US Marines:
Here lies your best friend."

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Before He Deployed to Korea

SYLVIA ROJAS VAUGHN

His Mother had taught him
to swallow sadness.

He was not an angry boy
but reared
to be strong despite
everything.

And when
the exploding grenade
severed

a foot, fingers,
gouged an eye

he bit his lip,
smiled feebly
at the corpsman

applying pressure
to so many points.

When discharged,
he tossed the Purple Heart

in a drawer
with the .45,
fingering them
with his good hand
from time to time.



STANDING ON THE UPSTAIRS LANDING SABRINA MENDOZA

Named

D. M. WILKINS

It was around one in the afternoon when I got my first and only confession of the day. I heard the curtain draw back. Then the person entered the booth. When I heard two steps in a woman's heeled shoes, followed by the crinkling of a frilled dress against the wooden bench and the resting of a purse against the floor, I knew it was her. She had come in twice before in the exact same way. Only, previously, she never had said a word. She just had sat there for a few minutes, both times, before getting up to leave. Today was different. Immediately, she began a confession.

"I ain't a religious person, Father. This is only the second time I've ever been here. In fact, I really don't know why I've come today. It's just that it's my baby's first birthday. And as I was idling around at the foot of

**"DOESN'T EVERY GIRL
DESERVE TO FEEL SPECIAL?"
SHE PLEADED.**

the steps in front of the building, something told me I should come inside. I went to the altar, and I don't know if what I did counts as a prayer, but I gave it my best shot anyway, for my baby. Still, it didn't feel like the thing was quite complete. So, seemed all that was left was for me to sit down here."

She said the whole thing had started because she had wanted to feel, "just once" in her life, "so very special. Doesn't every girl deserve to feel special?" She pleaded. Then, I tried to count the number of times she said the word special, but I couldn't keep up.

She found idol worship deplorable. "A princess is born with a crown on her head into a society with mansions, and inherits a whole country to bow down to her and answer to her every beck and call. And the female celebrity is put on the pedestal of some kind of goddess, with all kinds of men wanting to kiss her feet or the ground she walks on. It's all so useless." She disparaged. She expressed a queer disdain for silver. "It may not seem to make much sense, Father, but I hate silver. Silver this, silver that." She said, and went on.

"A precious, little daddy's girl receives the wonders of the world on a silver platter, and eats as much as she wants with a silver spoon in her mouth. And her life is so grand carried on beneath clouds with silver linings. Not to mention, she wastes silver by the

buckets full.” She continued, loathing, “But the main reason I don’t like silver, plain and simple, is ‘cause silver don’t like me.

Some women have known special their whole lives long.” And as these women know special, she said she simply had wanted to know for herself that kind of special she only had read of in “storybooks telling about handsome, well-to-do knights, riding in on white horses to rescue damsels in distress. You know, the kind of thing every girl dreams about.”

He made her feel the kind of special she never had known. Her lover. She said he had been around for eight months, far longer than the rest. He told her all the time that she was pretty. He pampered her unendingly: paying to get her hair and nails done; feeding her romantic candlelit dinners he had prepared; and treating her to indulgent massages after they had shared long, steamy baths together. No man ever had done any of those things. He bought her all kinds of fancy dresses. She relished the attention she got whenever she donned the dresses during their nights out on the town.

“He moved all his stuff in. He wanted to make a home with me. Plus that, I like his kind of affection. Kinda controlling, you know. And his possessive, dominating, physical love. That hearty rock of his, taxing my body. Just so strong. Penetrating the physical and runnin’ right through to my spiritual. Maybe you know what I mean, Father. Maybe you don’t. And well, I know it ain’t godlike, cause we never got married. But a woman’s got needs, and I ain’t no saint. Ain’t trying to be, neither.

But I guess I don’t need to keep going on about it, except to say that the things he did made me feel like I belonged to somebody. Call me crazy but it feels nice, even to be owned, if it’s by someone who really wants

you. He said he would take me to Hawaii some day. I never seen the likes of anywhere besides this Podunk town, except on TV. He paid for that too. I’ll never forget the day he made me well up with tears so that I nearly burst. When he called me his Special Gal. That’s what it was. That’s the very thing that done me in for good, and he didn’t even know it. You see, Father, special is like a kind of blanket for me. How can I say it so you’ll understand?” She stopped to think for a moment. Then started again. “It’s the blanket that covers all my poor and ugly imperfect. He did special to me. And it shot the moon.

Everything was fine, until one day when he took note of my belly. I had kept it hidden from everyone for a good long while, even him. Nobody was wise to it but me. I figured it was best just to keep quiet about it. I mean, yeah, he noticed it. He thought I was just puttin’ on a little weight, and I was seven months in before he figured it out. When he did, he barely said anything to me, just that he didn’t want no children. Even though we had laid and made one together, he said he hadn’t any use for a child.

From that day on, the pain of what he said grew in me like the terriblest thing you couldn’t imagine. I already had started to feel an affinity for my unborn child. It felt like the best part of me. But it burned in my head like liquid metal, the thought of that man someday leaving me. And I knew that he would without him ever having to say it. He had left other women for far lesser things. It really was from then on that things started to be different; although, I guess I just hadn’t wanted to see it. Looking back, I ignored the signs. We fought a lot. He stopped buying me stuff. Started coming in later and later all the time at nights, and leaving earlier in the mornings. And when the phone rings at three in the morning, you can bet it ain’t somebody calling about the

weather. But I wasn't going to accept any of it. I kept right on anyway. For the three months after Baby was born, I tried all I knew to make everything work out alright for the three of us. But in my heart, I knew it wasn't to be.

So, one day as I prepared Baby in the carriage, I tried hard to think of my options. As it was, nobody but me and my lover had known about the birth of my baby. Not even my mother. I guess I hadn't told anybody because in the back of mind I still didn't know what I aimed to do about things. So, even though there were the homes of relatives, I had to figure they would ask too many questions. There was the hospital, but hospitals have too much traffic to and fro, and cameras watching everywhere. Then, I thought of this here church. This building has been so good to me. But this didn't seem like the right place either. Then I remembered a small detail. It came to me how Baby loved the blankets. He loved the fuzzy, soft blankets, those ones hanging near the back corner of that expensive, department store. It was one of the only times me and Baby would leave the apartment, to go to that big department store to cash my government checks. Baby loved to be out and about. He would kick and laugh and make baby talk to people walking by. He liked that department store. Strolling through the aisles of that massive place was like a walk in wonderland for him. But it was funny how he always seemed most content in one little corner of that big ol' store. The other mothers and their babies hardly ever came back there. There weren't so many name-brand things over there and displays all fixed up with mannequins, you know. In fact, the most beautiful thing in that corner was the big, pretty, multicolored blankets that hung like a waterfall against the wall. I would wave them around, and Baby would go

Calibration

EVAN HINTON

Eight bits
like the eyes of a spider
cannot weigh
your smile
transcending every
dimension
impossible to decipher

Façade

HALEY WALLACE

Honeyed words soak your lips;
a sign of trouble, of eminence,
ensues and drift to my ears
and there it plants and doubles my fears.

Your eyes, black diamonds, stare through my breast,
invade my heart, and multiply my distress.
Though your smile is sweet my tears are sweeter,
innocent as the doe and rejoice us neither.

You have no tears, only cold honey—
thick and sticky and unsettling.

crazy in his carriage. That day before leaving my apartment, I thought long and hard then decided I had the right notion.

As I approached the corner of the department store, I could see the pretty blankets were just as they always had been. Only, this time they were draped around a 700-dollar, solid-oak crib, that had been clearance marked to 475. This was the most out-of-place thing I ever had seen in that little corner. But, it was so much the better. I told myself Baby could sleep in style.

I took Baby from the carriage. I squeezed him so tight that I believe some of his very soul must've rushed right out into mine. In fact, I knew it was true because I had not felt him so strong within me before then. And I've felt him in me, just like that, ever since. For most of that day Baby had been cranky and fussy, but when I laid him down on that lavish bed and wrapped him in those soft, fuzzy blankets he began to ease. There was a hush that fell over him. Still, I waited a short while. By and by, Baby didn't make a sound. He just looked up at me, stretched a big Baby stretch, smiled then fell into a peaceful sleep. I reached down to give him a kiss, but I couldn't. I knew to leave well enough alone. Then, that was it. It was over. And it was time for me to leave the big department store again.

On the bus ride home I thought hard about a lot of stuff. Aren't we all, everyday, just looking for our own, individual kind of special? Once she finds it, doesn't a body do whatever's necessary to keep it? What is the taste of silver? I mean, what does it taste like? What is it like to breathe the air that swirls about in big ole mansions? How is it to go about everywhere with a crown perched on top of your head? I can say I know for a fact that lips tickle when they kiss the underside of your foot?" She snickered strangely.

Finally, she broke. She broke down, crying inconsolably. In a wild rash of insufferable emotion she began to rant, praying futility that it was still

warm inside Baby's blankets. In that corner of the store where Baby was no more. She wailed out loud and horrifically. Her cry was shrill and unabated. At a point I was not sure I could stand beneath the gravity of her confessing, how not a solitary day goes by that she doesn't think of him, and of the eternal nightmares about a floating black speck representing the hole in her soul. I believe that was the place in her from which the howling arose. That terrible howling. Until, eventually she stopped talking, and there was nothing more. Just the bellowing. The sound that seemed finally to break out after having been buried forever beneath a thousand tons. At first I tried to placate her with words. It was no use. So, I left her alone. And she would go on like this for a tiny eternity.

Then, it seemed out of nowhere when, by and by, she did gather the pieces of herself and went right back to telling her story. Only, when she had started back, there was the sense about her spirit of something renewed, as though a critical weight had been lifted. With care, she mentioned how she has visited hers and Baby's corner of the department store many times since that fateful day. And that she can feel somehow that Baby is well looked after. I kept expecting she would conclude her confession with incessant ramblings about the man she loved and the countless wonders of their revived relationship. She did not. In fact, she didn't speak another word about her lover, except to say that he never again did ask about his Baby. It felt awkward not knowing their resulting status; but then, I figured somehow that I already had known.

Then she was silent. She began again, saying, "You know, Father, I learned something about special. Sometimes it just ain't what you thought it would be. And, more often than not, that storybook with the fairytale prince in it ain't worth the paper it's written on. But, that's just how I see it." She paused again.

Then, I heard what sounded like two hollow pieces of metal clinking together, then the sound of her purse resting against the floor again. The metal clinked softly, on and off while she continued.

"I had tried to figure out exactly what I came here for. I wasn't sure about my reasons. I just knew I needed to come. Now I think I know." She revealed.

"Have you not come here for absolution?" I searched.

"No. I mean, well, I thought I had. But I already felt that burden fly from me a moment ago. I may not know where my baby is, but I do know his name and that he's alright. Don't ask me how, I just know. I guess that's all that matters to me. Ain't no use wondering whether I'm right with God. I figured a while back that I ain't got it in me to aspire to something so complex. In fact, I can tell you surely that when I last left here, I never thought I'd see this place again."

AT FIRST I TRIED TO PLACATE HER WITH WORDS. IT WAS NO USE. SO, I LEFT HER ALONE.

It was then that I wondered if the woman had grown up in this church, until at last she finished her story.

"Early that morning before the sun came up, I had started to feel my baby coming. And I got so scared I didn't know what to do. I just got off the bus and started walking, and walking. Then, when I thought I couldn't go anymore, I saw the cross on the backside of the steeple. And I stumbled up onto the back steps of this building.

I tried to be quiet, but I could not hold my screams. I was in agony. A Sister had heard me and came out to see. She talked about calling for help, but I told her I would leave if she told even a single other soul. She made a cross on her chest. I knew then that she was well with God.

How to Make Your Own Hell

NICHOLAS McLEAN

"From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire"
Robert Frost, *Fire and Ice*

The Fire always burns away
The sins committed without measure,
Churning, burning night and day

The strange feeling that you get,
Too much pain and too much pleasure,
The fire always burns away.

Excess knows no bounds but the ones behind it,
Leaping off the ledge and diving into the abyss,
Churning, burning, night and day.

So far from the sheets of lace
Down below in the blackest darkness,
The Fire always burns away.

And in this lonely, hollow place
The heart builds itself a pyre,
Churning, burning night and day

Secrets this heart might betray,
Lost in the tongues of desire,
Sins the Fire always burns away,
Churning, burning, night and day.

Then, she went back inside. When an old bum wandered by, I told him to beat it and hoped that he wouldn't bring anybody back thataway. He never did. The Sister came out again quickly with a big bowl of warm water, a beautiful crocheted blanket, and some towels. She laid me out longwise on one of the large steps then dampened one of the towels. She told me to bite down on it each time the pains came. I did. And ever so often she would ask me a question that had nothing to do with childbirth, and it aggravated me a little. The only question I rightly recall is that she asked me what my favorite way to pass the time was, while she rubbed my hand in hers. But I was so gripped with pain I couldn't give her no answer.

I really don't know quite how it all fit together--the trick with the towel and the idle questions about myself. But it did, somehow it all helped me through. She helped me through the hardest thing in my life. Funny thing was, since shortly after she gave me that crocheted blanket, I've carried it wrapped in a small bundle in my purse. It's never left me, not the blanket nor my gratitude for what she did.

After the thing was over, she cleaned my baby up and wrapped him in the blanket. She wrapped me in the towels, and attended to me for a little while longer. I don't know how I done it, but I was, surely enough, getting up to leave when she begged me to let her get someone to take me home. I would have nothing of it. I was turning surely to walk away, and she thought certainly that I would give my baby a name. I could not. She gave me some suggestions, but none of them seemed quite right. And as I was leaving, I couldn't help but notice that it was the thing about the name that had saddened her the most.

In the end, it made me feel bad that she had given me so much and that I had given her nothing in return. I guess my heart couldn't leave it thataway. I realize now it's the reason I am here today. I am here to beg a favor of you, Father. I never had much to offer anyone. And I ain't got much to offer now. But there's something I would like you to deliver for me today. Her name was Sister Cheaney. When you see her, please deliver this message: tell her that in my free time, I like to crochet."

With that, the woman grew silent again. And shortly after, I heard the crinkling of her dress and the knocking of her heeled shoes against the floor as she left the confessional booth, drifting gradually towards, then through the front church doors. Later I thanked the Lord that was the only confession I got all that day because I can be sure I could not have handled even a shard more than that.

At the end of the evening, as I was tidying the booths, I came upon the booth where the woman had sat. At the far end of the wooden bench, I saw a crocheted blanket neatly folded. On top of it lied a crudely fashioned paper tent. I took the piece of paper. It read, simply, For Sister Cheaney.

I put together that the metal clinking sound I'd heard earlier must have been from the woman crocheting as she'd spoken to me. It was then that she had been struck with the crucial epiphany. A guarded memento of some sort. And I could not resist knowing what she had added to the blanket. So, with a quick prayer that God might forgive my wayward curiosity, I opened the blanket to see inside that the three tiny words she had stitched thereupon were ones that would forever remain impressed upon my own heart, Landon Michael Scott.



Who is Teaching Them to Forget?

SHARON ORSBORN

It's Cinco de Mayo; most folks celebrate the day.
But my world changed forever on the fifth of May.

It has been three years since my boy died.
A fact that I wish I could run from and hide.

But I can't hide from the awful truth.
My son died in the prime of his youth.

He fought in a war that was ugly and mean.
And he came home broken from things he'd seen.

Deep down in my heart it's really ok.
I know that I'll see him again one day.

But it hurts just the same that he's gone from this life.
He'll never have children, a home, or a wife.

He fought for something that isn't quite clear.
And the fight continues year after year.

Too many have been lost in the heat of the fight.
Even more are haunted by their dreams at night.

Statistics announce that because of the stress
many vets think there's just one way out of this mess.

Brave soldiers who've served try to take their own lives,
leaving their children, their parents, their wives.

They are trained to do battle, to fight till they've won.
But who's teaching them how to forget what they've done?



SEPTEMBER 11 TEN YEAR #10 NICK YOUNG

Freedom

DEBORAH WORTHINGTON

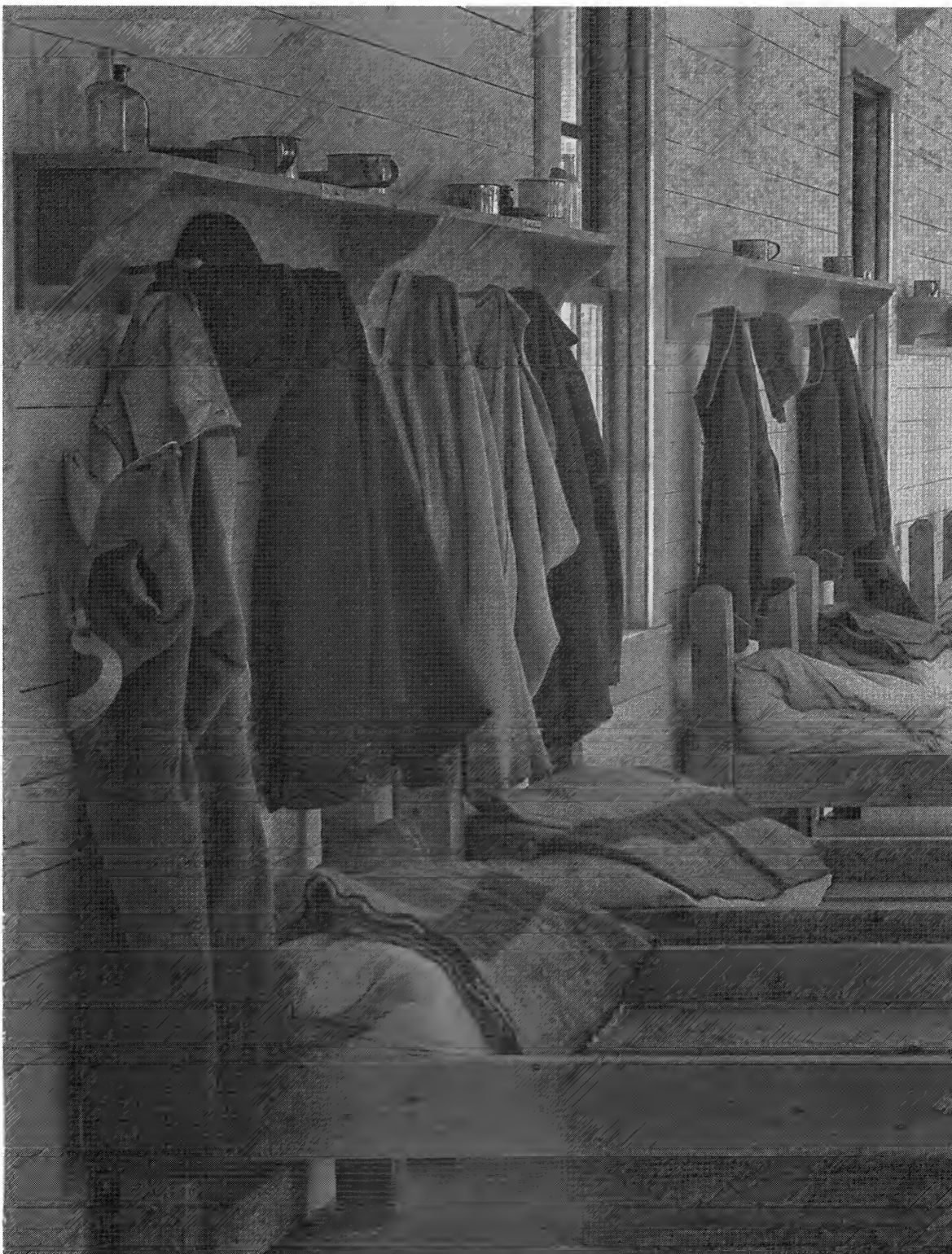
Americans know about freedom. In school we learn how our forefathers fought and died so we can live in a free society. Yet few of us encounter freedom because its true nature is experienced only through its opposite. Even though my husband was a career Army soldier, freedom was still an abstract concept to me.

In August 1989, visiting colleagues stationed in West Berlin, we were enjoying an evening on the town—great schnitzel, a few glasses of Riesling, tales of past exploits swapped with longtime friends as we crammed into a Volkswagen bug to see the Berlin Wall after dark. Seconds after arriving at the massive concrete barrier, we stood mute; our gala laughter transformed into a requiem lament.

I walked to the nearest mobile viewing trestle and ascended the stairs to the observation platform twelve feet above the pavement. Across the expanse, light masts transformed evening into day; the glaring flood lights unable to camouflage the depth of inner darkness. From my elevated perch, I viewed the gradation known as 'no man's land', the 'dead zone' or 'death's strip'; all names apposite. The sole harvest of these harrowed rows of barren ground was despair, anguish and death. A swath of sand scrutinized for footprints and a chain of signal construction replete with trip wires and land mines prevented anyone from crossing undetected. Deep-set trenches alongside the strip of concrete road prohibited the further advance of patrolling vehicles. Emanating from this corridor of misery loomed the ubiquitous watchtowers dominating the horizon like malevolent sentries; turrets shielded snipers brandishing rifles aimed not in my direction, but searching for its fellow citizens.

The words from President John F. Kennedy's Berlin address echoed in my ears, "Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in..." I'd been a military wife for sixteen years and yet for the first time I understood why Bob's job was so important, why the sacrifice of military families was worth the cost. Freedom is fragile.

Berliners woke one morning in 1961 to find East German Troops surrounding West Berlin, blocking East Berliners from entering the western part of the city, while the concrete wall was constructed. Standing there in August, I had no idea that this barrier against basic human freedom and dignity that had symbolized tyranny for 28 years, would not survive much longer. The wall was breached November 9, 1989 and torn down bit by bit in the ensuing year, but our family has never forgotten its impact—obtaining freedom is long struggle but losing it takes only a moment. Our duty as Americans is to remain vigilant. To stand with the oppressed, wherever they may live, until the day all people are free.



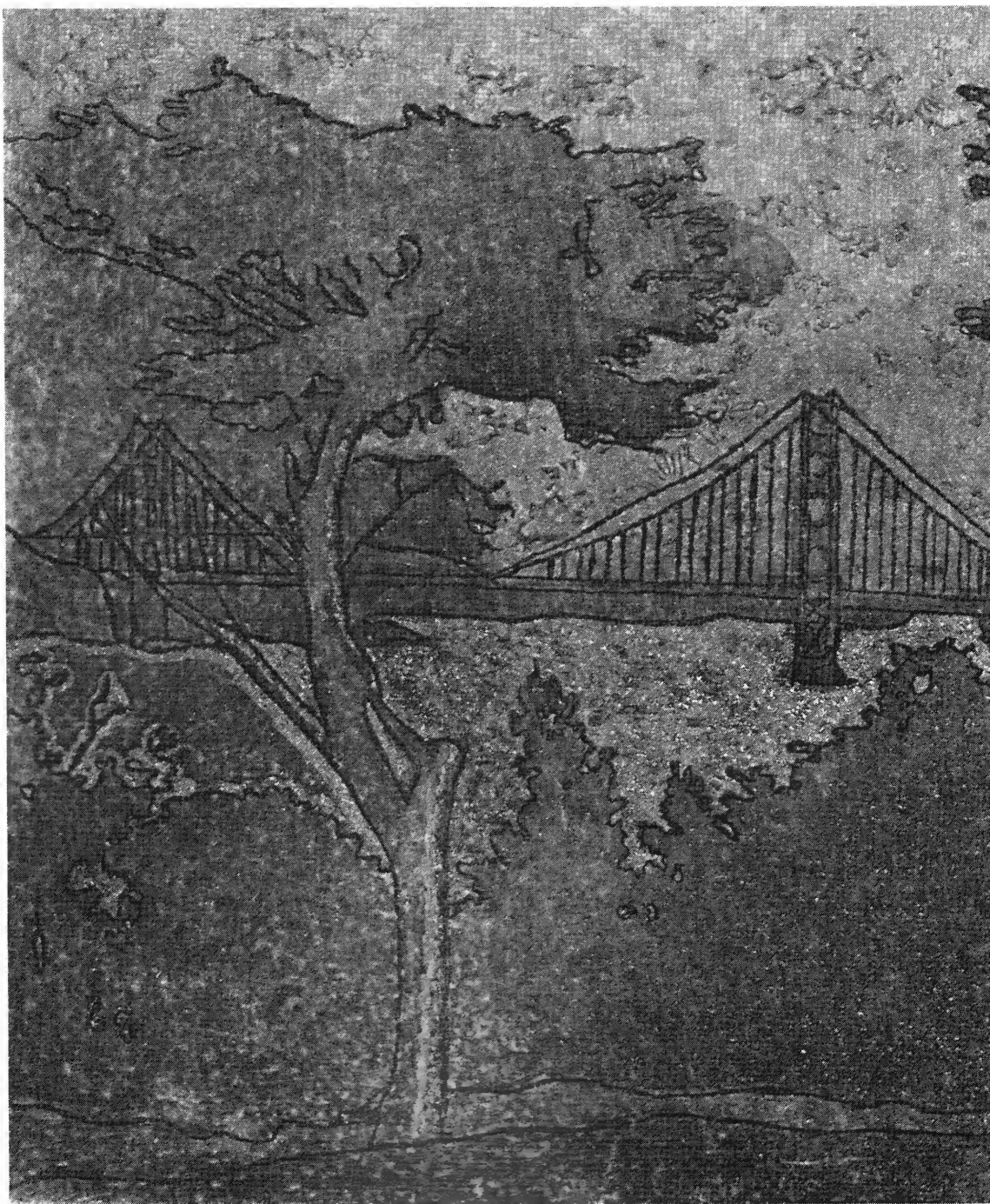
BARRACKS, FT. ABRAHAM LINCOLN, ND J. ALLEN WHITESIDE



The Wall, Reminder of the First Living-Room War

SYLVIA ROJAS VAUGHN

Do amputees dressed
in fatigues see past
their reflections
in the names marching
across polished stone,
hear something other than
hushed voices of the crowd?
Father says on one mission
he heard only
mechanical sounds.
Chopper blades.
Machine gun fire.
Not like in the movies.
If anyone shouted Charge!
no one heard it.
I wondered every day
if I would see Father
on a stretcher on TV.
In tonight's broadcast
from the VFW,
the retired sergeant's
voice catches
as he reads the names
of local MIAs, KIAs.
The announcer interrupts.
Will it rain? Stay tuned.



THE VIEW AVA EVERETT



O Victoria

SYLVIA S. MEDEL

(Personification)

Such a pretty name! So feminine when spoken.
There's an air of romance in your name.

Quaint, your unique charm appeals to one's senses.
Dainty, your delicate beauty likens to a goddess.
Fascinating is your story of existence.

You've welcomed me with open arms
And drawn me close to your heart.

Will I ever forget you?

Not, for a thousand reasons:

Not for the lovely flowers

Adorning your landscapes;

Not for abounding maple and cedar trees

Along the roads and mountain ridges;

Not with the fragrance of the pines

That floats in the air wildly;

Not with the rustle of leaves

When the night sleeps

And the drizzles in the wee hours,

All like symphony to my ears.

And when the sun awakens to a glorious morn
Victoria, you stand there small, yet dignified and victorious,
A picturesque city by the sea beckoning me to return.
How can I ever forget you? Not today. Not ever.
You have indeed, enchanted me.

Tiresias

NICHOLAS McLEAN

I I think the worst part of having my grandfather live with us
Is when he would say "I told you so."

"Take me to the beach," he would ask,
"We'll go next week, I promise," I'd say.
"No you won't," he would sigh.

Next week came along and sure enough
We were too busy to go to the beach,
And grandfather would be sad despite knowing.

II My grandfather liked to set my ears burning
With embarrassment.

"You know why I'm blind?" he'd say.
"One time I walked in on Athena bathing,"
"She blinded me for it but it was worth it,
Because I can still see those tits."

III My grandfather took me fishing once
And said "I bet I'll catch more fish than you,"
"I bet you won't!" I fired back.

He won the bet, of course.

We used to do stuff together all the time...

IV I asked my grandfather
Why he went with us on that trip to Colorado Springs
If he knew he was going to have a heart attack.

"Because," he replied.
"I wanted to be with you guys,"

And then he paused before saying
"Don't cry."

I didn't want to cry then
But when I think about him standing there by the spring fountain,
Clutching his hand on his chest then falling to the dirt,
I do.

Humbled Brothers

AUSTIN HELMREICH

I could not believe what I was hearing, so I asked again, “What did you say?” My best friend of many years sighed in shame for the second time and responded, “I never learned how to ride a bike.”

Ben Lovell had been my best friend since grade school. I remember patiently waiting for my second grade art class to start when quite casually, a boy who I had never seen before walked through the door, took a quick look around, and then made his way to the desk closest to me. We avoided eye contact and conversation for a few minutes until he suddenly turned to me and energetically said, “Have you seen *The Lord of the Rings*?”

**TO THIS DAY BEN AND I REMEMBER
AND REVEL IN THAT BICYCLE BONDING
TIME BETWEEN US.**

He seemed discouraged when I said my parents would not allow me to see it until I turned thirteen. However, he assured me that when I was of age, he would be the first to watch it with me.

From that point on Ben and I continued to grow closer together. We climbed every tree, walked every path, and slew every imaginary villain that got in our way. Defending the walls of Helm’s Deep from Sauraman’s ravaging Ura-khl was also one of our favorite pastimes. Though I had not seen *The Lord of the Rings*, Ben comforted me with his superior knowledge and assured me that we were playing it exactly how it had happened in the movie.

We remained friends up into middle school where we traded in our imaginary castles and goblins for video games and sports. One Saturday in our eighth grade year, Ben and I found ourselves hopelessly bored so I asked him to ride bikes to the park with me. I was horrified when I learned that he had never been taught to ride a bike. After spending a

minute or two in silent shock I offered to teach him how to ride. He accepted my offer three weeks later, I believe, after I reached a soft spot in his soul with my pure-hearted sincerity and constant badgering.

At the start, I was not completely sure how I was going to teach Ben to ride. I remembered how my dad had taught me by holding the back of the seat with one hand while steadying the handle bars with the other. He would then walk beside me and let go of the bike when I felt confident enough. Ben and I debated over teaching him the same way but decided it was altogether unnecessary since he was much older and more capable than I had been.

So, given our limited knowledge of physics and adventurous nature, we decided the best way for Ben to learn would be to push him down the neighborhood's steepest hill and let his natural instincts take over. It seemed rather obvious that if he was given the necessary speed the balance would just come to him. The result was a scraped knee and elbow along with a helmet that had slightly less paint on it than before.

Our next attempt was a slightly more conservative approach. We figured that the speed from the hill had ruined Ben's concentration and thus thrown his balance off. Therefore, we agreed that the next best thing to do was give him a solid push on a level surface. The speed that had thrown his balance off before was taken out of the equation so we expected him to learn to ride before the end of the day. After twenty odd attempts, it became apparent that Ben was not going to get any further than fifteen feet before falling over.

Three weekends passed without us getting any closer to our goal. Saturday after Saturday our motivation deteriorated until we were looking for any excuse not to spend hours of fruitless effort trying to teach Ben to ride. Fortunately an opportune excuse came our way. I had turned thirteen the previous Tuesday making me the proper age to watch *The Lord of the Rings* with Ben as he had promised me years earlier. We had a *The Lord of the Rings* marathon sleepover that weekend.

While I watched and reveled in the glories of *The Lord of the Rings*, I was suddenly struck with a new thought. I started to think about the devotion Ben had showed me over the past five years of our friendship. How he had patiently waited for me to be the right age and how he had never pressured me into watching it against my parents' will. I felt convicted that I would give up trying to teach my best friend something that he wanted to learn when he had waited for five years for something as simple as watching a movie with me.

After we finished the movie marathon I offered to try teaching him to ride again but with a slightly different approach this time. I hesitantly suggested that he learn the same way I had learned years earlier from my father. "Well I guess if you think it's the only way," he responded.

That Saturday afternoon Ben sat down on the bike, I put one hand awkwardly next to his and placed my other directly under the bike seat. Side by side we slowly lurched forward. If he began to lean to one side I would help him regain his balance. We were starting to gain speed when I saw a small smile emit from Ben's face as he confidently declared, "Let go!" Off he went performing one of the best street curb wipe outs I had ever seen. He got up with a whoop and a holler saying, "That's the furthest I've gotten this month!" We spent the rest of the day practicing and practicing until he was able to ride around the block confidently and completely by himself.

To this day Ben and I remember and revel in that bicycle bonding time between us. All along the course of teaching Ben to ride, both of us had known what needed to be done if he wanted to learn. In later years we talked about the process of teaching him. We found out that when we had debated over him learning the way my father had taught me we had both let pride get in the way. We had immediately thrown it out because our egos told us it would be too awkward. However, in actuality that process of learning deepened our relationship even further. We no longer let uncomfortable situations keep us from helping each other grow. We had moved from shallow friends to humbled brothers.

Off the Path (Why)

KELSEY JOHNSON

I wish to drift downstream
to forever, enveloped
in the liquid fire of
yesterday's leaves. Forever,
where laughter of Hamlin's
lost children is echoed,
remembered, in birdsong.
Forever, where the children
we were smear peachy-pink
paint clouds across a graying
blue twilight sky. Storm-tumbled
air whispers through damp hair,
calling to life a joy
that usually sleeps. For this
moment alone, I can see
with closed eyes. I can see
where the vivid souls
of the leaves go.

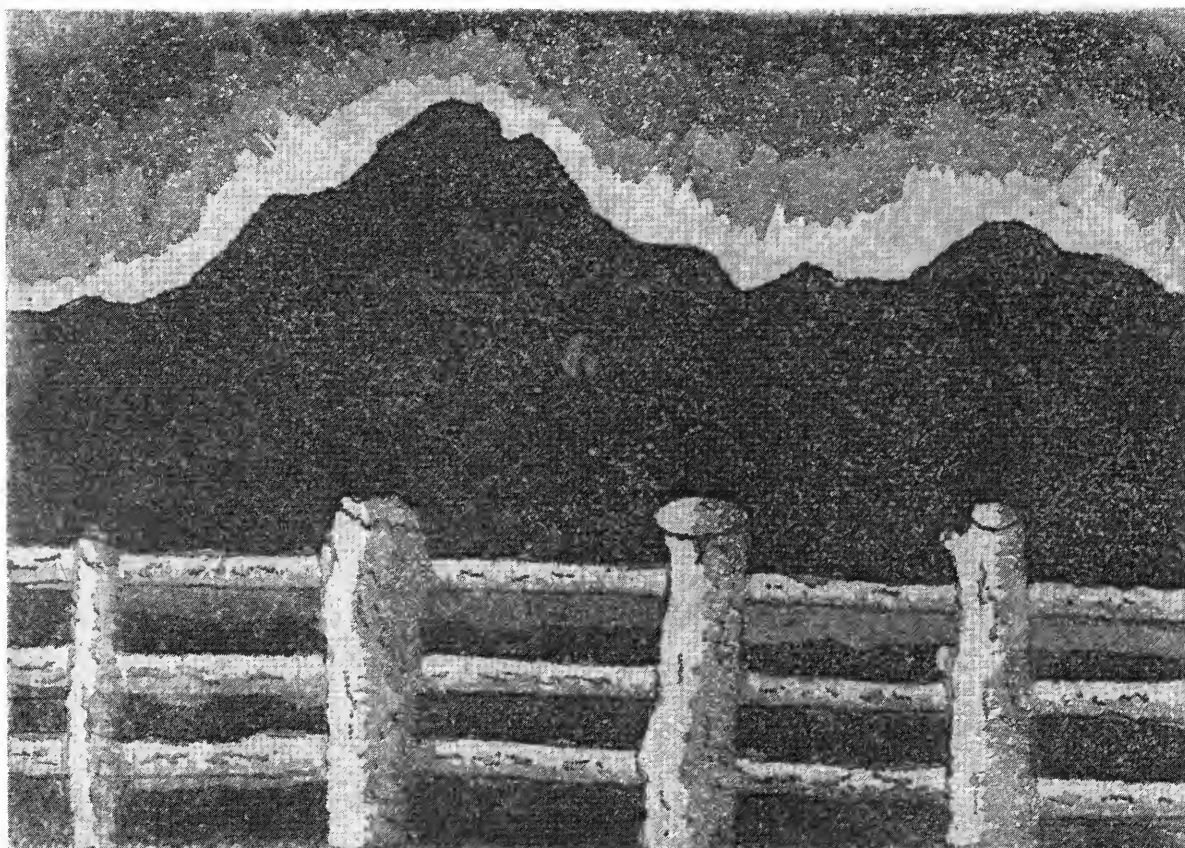
New Year's, 2011

SABRINA MENDOZA

Morning sun rose like a toast to life
and I, like a child of light

The new day yields new joys,
and transition from whence I lived.

Armed with dreams, I smile at history,
liberated from its grasp,
but not its lessons.



SPLIT RAIL FENCE AVA EVERETT

Friedrich's Wanderer

K. L. DRYK

Stands on a precipice, solitary.
Amber curls dance with the air
as I fall in love with his loneliness.

I feel the wind and the spray and the rock
beneath his feet as he questions
the fog. Clouds roll over the mountains

and whisper their mysteries to the stone. And we
lean out from the cliff and make
believe we can hear them.

* Inspired by *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*
by Caspar David Friedrich

Lincoln on My Tongue

COLLIN MILLER

Lincoln on my tongue,
crossing the belly of adolescence as
twitching feet dangle.
Soiled in the corner,
wet and salty cheeks.
Soupy seas
cover eyes that shouldn't bleed.
Shards of glass, they
penetrate as I crash, the
door I forgot to open.
Mommy, dressing poison ivy, is a
sharp splinter in me.
Saying, "Let's play
Terrorist." I
gagged lollipop lips.
Chords of rope tightened,
lacing places felt anew. Every
loop, each spiral, a
twisted playground, where
learning hands did touch.
Locker room showers. Lunch hours.
Contents turning sour. At
night's embrace, a
glance I'd take.

Dimpled hips began to smile,
tucked under one blue towel.
Sticky
cars parked,
distant dogs barked, our
friendship then was through.
"I love you."
I do too.
"I'll see you sometime soon."
Waiting doors
closed,
sleepovers ceased, your
cold gown down a frown.

He
moved.

Dripping suits of
elementary friends,
side by side they swayed.
This thing I
couldn't say.
"I am secretly gay."



The Last of Blood and Mire¹

D.M. WILKINS

You are the poet, Euryalus, and I the proud guardian,
but these words herein are engraved upon my heart.

So, now in the last as our spirits connect
hear them and be sure of what you are to me.

You know it better than any other,
that the heads of heroes are mounted above my mantle.
Lionhearted behind Trojan armor, we have ravaged
Greek fields afar as a force of one.

Listen now, My Love, as I will tell you what you
have not known of garnered baubles
I've carried in a tiny fabric sac beneath my breastplate
as trinkets of good fortune with me into battle.

LEGACY SABRINA MENDOZA



The procured locket of a Greek officer that you vested to me,
that day when chance first brought us to the same battlefield.

The folded piece of papyrus bearing My Warrior, Nisus,
the first poem that ever you wrote for me.

And the lock of your braided, chestnut hair,
lifted by my knife, while you slept upon my lap.

All these are the remnants of victory and love.
And I relish reminiscing of the sentiment they carry.
But the legacy of none among them outmatches
how this final tribute will comfort my soul.

My Love, we always have known of our fate, to die as warriors do.
Yet, as they encircle and handle you harshly, my eyes cannot withstand it.
So, from the cover of the wooded thicket, I storm these Rutulians.
I run, as fast and desperate as my battle proved legs will carry me.
As it weighs me down, I tear off my breastplate and catch the fabric sac in hand.

And even as they mock me in my solitary ambush,
I cannot be swayed by their sheer force in numbers.
My sight is set on one, in the center of them,
My Sweet Euryalus.

My chest bears the sharpened edges of their spearheads.
It is no great matter, but a means to an end.
Amid their circle, I feel their knife-blades at my back.
But they can know no victory now. I already have won,
as the sight of your face, Euryalus,
is the last I want my eyes to know.

Your own eyes look on me in our waning moments of life.
And I touch that warm blood running from your mouth.
And as I feel your lips between my fingers,
My Eternal Love, it is my ultimate victory!
Now, reach out your hand for me, Sweet Euryalus
and let us die in this field together.
Indeed. Let us be one. Forever.

¹ at the moment of their simultaneous deaths, a ballad from Nisus to Euryalus, two Trojan warrior lovers, accounted in Books 5 and 9 of Virgil's *The Aeneid*

Dripping Time Until the World Dissolves

NATE MATHERS

* Based on the paintings *The Persistence of Memory* and *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory* by Salvador Dalí.

Tick... Tock... Time floats still
as the inanimate air sways in the endless void.
The pale horizon starts to creep up on the
cold, dead hopeless terrain.

The faces of time slowly sag over the spineless,
branches and cubic bricks that stand valiantly.
You wander through this endless space,
not knowing where the sunlight will take you.

Then your heart starts to rumble,
it wails with the high pitch of a banshee.
Fractures start to plague the once subtle ground,
as the once peaceful world becomes chaotic.

Fractures split the crust like wrinkles
on a face of a fragile human.
Time starts seeping into the cracks
of the eternal abyss.

The world becomes a surreal backdrop.
Time has no presence on reality anymore.
You have no grip on reality.
You have no grip on anything.

Your world has now crumbled.
Nothing exists.
Just darkness.
Everything is empty.

I Never Wanted to be a ‘Why God-er’

HALEY WALLACE

March 10 and April 11 of 1998 were the days that stole my childhood. I was a happy, carefree six-year old. I knew nothing of heartache, helplessness, or bereavement. My days were filled by making mud pies, having tea parties, and candid, silly conversations with my five-year old little sister, Alana. Our parents were very young when I was born, only nineteen and twenty-one, and learned shortly after Alana’s birth that their love had run dry. Despite their separation we were the most loved children I knew. We were blissful and innocent. When that sticky spring bloomed I had no idea that I would soon learn that innocence is not a protection from injury.

We were on a R.V. trip to Florida with my Nana, Pop, and Aunt. I often think about how Alana and I marveled at the waves breaking over the white, sandy shore. I remember little of the trip, as to why I am not sure if it is because of my youthfulness or simply the roadblocks of my guarded memory. Pop was in the front seat and Nana held a map in the passenger seat as she talked to our Aunt. Alana and I sat gazing out window, soaking up the scenery. The ringing phone halted their conversation. White faces and loud heartbeats took hold of them, and Alana and I were immediately herded to the bedroom to watch a movie. I knew something was not right. I felt my world crack but did not know why.

My anxiousness grew as the darkness and silence of night crept in. Finally we stopped. I heard two new, but familiar, voices enter the trailer. We came out to see it was our Mom and her boyfriend. Their faces told of the terrible news that was about to follow. Our Dad was dead. A car wreck, we were told. I was too shocked to cry or ask questions.

ALANA HAD ALWAYS BEEN SUCH A BEAUTIFUL CHILD, MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN I; SHE WAS ALWAYS HAPPY AND CAREFREE; SHE WAS MY BEST FRIEND.

Unity

EVAN HINTON

One
floating point
beyond your pupils
glowing red
on and off
flashing memory
of words
truncated thoughts
which cannot be stored
in available space

The rising edge of sunrise
gates
your departure
The best approximation
of your contour
recedes into a series of terminals
Your smile has taken
off

I just sat there. Eventually I noticed Alana's tears, and she asked "Does that mean he's in heaven?" Our Mom replied, "Yes honey, he is." Another moment of silence ensued, and then Alana continued,

"Well, when is he coming back?" "He's not," I answered. We rode home with my Mom and her boyfriend in his green pickup truck. Alana, still confused and exhausted, slept beside me in the back seat. The entire drive home I rested my head on the front seat's center console while my mother caressed my hair and I pretended to sleep. I laid there countless hours listening to them whisper.

Less than five weeks later it was Easter. My numbness had carried me through the funeral and I don't remember sleeping, eating, going to kindergarten, or whether or not I ever cried. My Mom and her boyfriend had taken me and Alana out to Sandy Lake for an Easter egg hunt. It was the first beautiful day that I had noticed since I had lost my Dad. We smiled, laughed, and left our worries elsewhere. At the end of the day we reveled in our treasure filled eggs and Easter themed stuffed animals. When the day was over we piled inside my Mom's small car, separately from her boyfriend because we were headed to visit our Granny.

Hot and tired, Alana and I quickly fell asleep. I randomly drifted in and out of slumber during the car ride. In an instance of consciousness I felt the car begin to slow. Then suddenly there was a harsh hit from the rear. Jerk. Drop. Jolt. Roll. Roll. Roll. Roll. Roll. Roll. Over and over our car rolled. I grabbed my stuffed bunny and held it to my face, trying to shield myself from the flying debris of shattered glass. Finally the car halted. I exposed my face to find that I was partially

upside down. I noticed a lot of dust. I noticed eerie silence. Above all I noticed that I was alone. I released myself from the seatbelt and crawled out of the broken, backseat window. I stood in the middle of a bright, white-rock filled lot. The sun seemed blinding and I remember stumbling and covering my eyes. I walked around and began to search for my family.

About sixty-feet away from what was left of our car I found my mother. She was bloodied from head-to-foot, with exposed bone above one of her eyes, elbows, and leg. Although her injuries disabled her from vision, she heard me approach and called out to me. "Haley?" she called. I wonder to this day how she knew it was me. "Yes Mommy," I feebly replied. "Where's Alana?" she asked. Not being sure, I told her that I would find her and come back. I searched around our car until I had left only one side unexplored. I rounded the corner and saw my sister. Alana had always been such a beautiful child, more beautiful than I; she was always happy and carefree; she was my best friend. She now lay crumpled on the ground at my feet, her face and light brown hair clotted with blood. I looked to her head and saw a large area of exposed skull. She breathed no more. She smiled no more. I screamed.

Several witnesses stopped and one in particular scooped me up into her arms and carried me to where her own children were standing. All were in awe at the devastation I had just walked away from. She placed me on the hood of her car and called for an ambulance as I wept. All I could think to ask of her was to please call my Granny to tell her we would be late. Police officers, fire trucks, ambulances, and even a CareFlite helicopter arrived. My memory again

blocks most of the aftermath from attainment, but I do remember being taken for inspection by the paramedics and them having to sedate me because I would not stop screaming. I remember tearfully shrieking as they put in an IV. I awoke briefly during the helicopter ride and saw my mother next to me being attended to by several paramedics, as her injuries were life threateningly severe. At the far end of the cabin, as far away from us as possible, I thought saw a third stretcher covered in a sheet. With grief and disbelief I closed my eyes and fell out of consciousness.

In the hospital I heard many whispers from the doctors about how they could not believe that I had no severe wounds, merely a few minor scratches and bruises, only one of which has even left a scar. My Pop spent many silent hours in my room, watching me sleep. He is the one

**MY NUMBNESS HAD CARRIED ME
THROUGH THE FUNERAL AND I
DON'T REMEMBER SLEEPING,
EATING, GOING TO KINDERGARTEN,
OR WHETHER OR NOT I EVER CRIED.**

I eventually found the braveness to ask if Alana was really gone. The pain I saw on his face when he answered will always haunt me. He was a broken man, with both son and granddaughter taken. Nana and Pop brought me home and cared for me while my mother spent a few weeks in the hospital. When we got home the first thing that I did was take a bath. I remember how the hot water stung my cuts, and how I cried as Nana washed my hair.

At the funeral I sat in silence. My second funeral in little more than a month. I remember watching my broken mother, while being pushed in her wheelchair, kiss Alana's casket.

I remember sitting through the service and watching everyone weep. I remember how sticky and suffocating the air seemed when we sat for the burial. I remember feeling like my life was over. I remember questioning God, of whom little I knew of, and my entire existence and being. I remember thinking to myself how selfish I was for only trying to protect myself while the car was rolling. I even remember wishing that it was me that they were burying that day. Suddenly I felt as though my short six and a half years in this world were actually millennia.

I am now almost twenty-years old. Last year I found out that my Dad had not been in a car wreck, but instead had stuck a gun in his mouth on the side of an abandoned road. Although I thought once that I would never be happy again, I am. Despite the fact that I was never truly a child again after those cruel days, I do find joy and goodness in life. I never wanted to be a “why God-er,” but I do admit that I will never understand why they had to be taken from me. I will never be truly healed but I know now that I can move forward. I write my story not to invoke sorrow or sympathy for myself or my family, but merely out of memory and respect for my guardian angels, whom taught me to cherish life, love, and family above all, and whom I know are smiling down at me now.

She is Just Sleeping

JESSIE MANN

She is just sleeping,
her arms folded so neatly, as though
she stood at a wedding. I could almost hear the bells
ringing.

She is just sleeping.
Her eyes sealed shut like someone ran a zipper across,
but they could still flutter open once she returns
from that blissful place our minds take us in slumber.

She is just sleeping,
wearing a lovely silk gown with flowers surrounding her,
covering her inch by inch. She always did adore daisies,
but I do not see any.

She is just sleeping.
Her mouth is so still, but her lips look as though
they just might move
into a tiny smile.

So goodnight, my friend. Sweet dreams.
We can talk as soon as you wake up. After all,
you
are
just
sleeping.

Jimmie Calvin

KATIE LIPSCOMB

I love singin' the blues
 Slow dancin' on your shoes
 Let's put on our pj's
 and shoot the moon
 When morning comes
 Clanking pots and pans
 Let's go feed the fawn, Jimmie
 There's age on your hands,
 and after we'll dream in hammocks,
 and eat onions from the ground,
 trade stories of Pickle sisters,
 and look at all the bugs we've found.
 I'll pitch washers with the sandman
 and ask if he'll hold this moment still
 I am 5
 and so are you
 and we've got all the time to kill
 I'll see you in your overalls
 on the farm where you grew up
 I'll see you get the belt
 when you try and act too tough
 I'll see you walk to school
 and I'll see you give Ruby a ring
 I'll see your love grow,
 I'll see your faults show,
 but I'll be damned if I miss a thing.
 For I see what you are,
 and it is infinite.
 And I thought it's time that you should know
 that
 I measure your spirit in the mountains
 and my love
 for you
 in
 miles

Forecast Calls for Stopped Time

JOSHUA OLDFATHER

Humid mists drift loudly,
 A barrage of water,
 Sheets drifting, slanted rain.

Heavy leaves unload their
 Burden, dripping sorrow
 Onto parched waiting earth.

Vivid orange specters
 Stare through obscuring
 Cumulous framed cement.

Light not shone, hid by clouds
 Mounds of mud and girders;
 Skeletal ribs glistening.

Work called off for weary
 People watching reports
 As halted time marched in place.



Two Veterans Remember Returning from the Korean Police Action

SYLVIA ROJAS VAUGHN

a train loaded with stinky guys

P. U.!

from Munsan-ni abutting the Armistice Line

"Charlie" rations, binoculars, ammo were shipped to that village
south to Ascom City

some general must have named it
ordered to strip

outdoors in January!

nearly froze my butt off

almost choked to death on the delousing powder

next day, cast off at Inchon

seasick thirty days

no brass band met us

our brides met us at the altar,

Susie B. put a rose on Tank's

grave



Welcoming Troops from the Front at Dawn

SYLVIA ROJAS VAUGHN

The time was approximate until early that morning,
when the terminal at D/FW was also disclosed.
We dressed in red, white and blue, carried baskets
of chocolate bars, stuck miniature flags in gimme caps.
We talked about shaking hands with the service men and women,
perhaps patting their shoulders, backs. We wondered if any
would stop for a moment to share a war story or say
they couldn't wait to see Heather back home.
The USO organizers passed out lapel pins, announced
we must observe some rules. For safety. Our jaws dropped
as if we'd just learned confetti cannons had shelled
the enemy outside the Green Zone. No cheering or clapping.
No sudden movements. Allow the returning personnel
to initiate contact. Smile but don't wave. We quieted
ourselves as the GIs strode past—some smiled and waved,
many accepted candy, some looked straight ahead,
expressionless. They all stopped at a cooler to fish out
bottled water before boarding an idling bus.

Discards

ERIN McKNIGHT

The first hands that sought the mangoes were children's. Soft knuckles surely lingered as fingertips busied themselves with my front door's serpentine motif of peeling paint.

Mothers waited at a distance, plastic grocery bags clenched in sun-swollen hands. My nod was the invitation to step onto the lawn, to release along with the bags' moistened creases presumptions of me as the youngest enlisted wife.

In the tree's sloping shade, harvesting began: women and children plucked, scooped, and dropped ripened mangoes into gaping-mouthed bags.

But in the evenings, when stewing kitchens forced them outdoors, boys and girls swarmed the tree without supervision. T-shirts pulled away from bodies, their cotton bellies bore the fruits' weight and carried pickings to places unspoiled.

Then they stopped coming. From behind my peephole the tree's waxen leaves appeared stripped, the aroma of seasoning fruit camouflaged. After only a few months of living on the base, Guantanamo's barbed boundary had encroached.

I caught her trespassing one afternoon, the branched canopy slicing her into sections of light and shadow. On the ridgeline above us Marines pounded the day into dusk.

She, and the mango cupped in her palm, blushed at me.

"Cravings," she offered with a shrug. "Can you believe I'm still getting them?"

I could have believed anything as I stared at her rounded middle.

When next I saw her she had been pared. Under a beach shelter, she cradled her son. Conversation quilted around us, but the loops of wire yards from our smoking barbeque pits held her attention.

Perhaps she scanned the fence line for defectors who, in pursuit of an American bounty, braved an indiscriminate sowing of land mines. Maybe she imagined the explosives lying in wait, heard the click of metal prongs depressed by a single misplaced foot.

Her baby went missing when the tree stood bare. It was only after flowering that the sharp knock, at odds with a young fist, resounded. The fruit had matured, but the sheet of paper slipped through my door jamb told me no one was looking for mangoes.

Another search planned. Any help appreciated.

Perhaps it was the stirring within that led me to the tree. Grocery bag handles threaded between my bloated fingers, I picked the fruit. Two reddened globes dropped for every one sought, yet I couldn't discard any. Left exposed, only a scattering of kernels would remain.

I drove to her, my offering tumbling across the floorboard. The mangoes bounced as I passed the next khaki-hued tract to be stripped of mines, land betraying no clue of its vicious intent—subversive earth that would offer no yield.

Isle

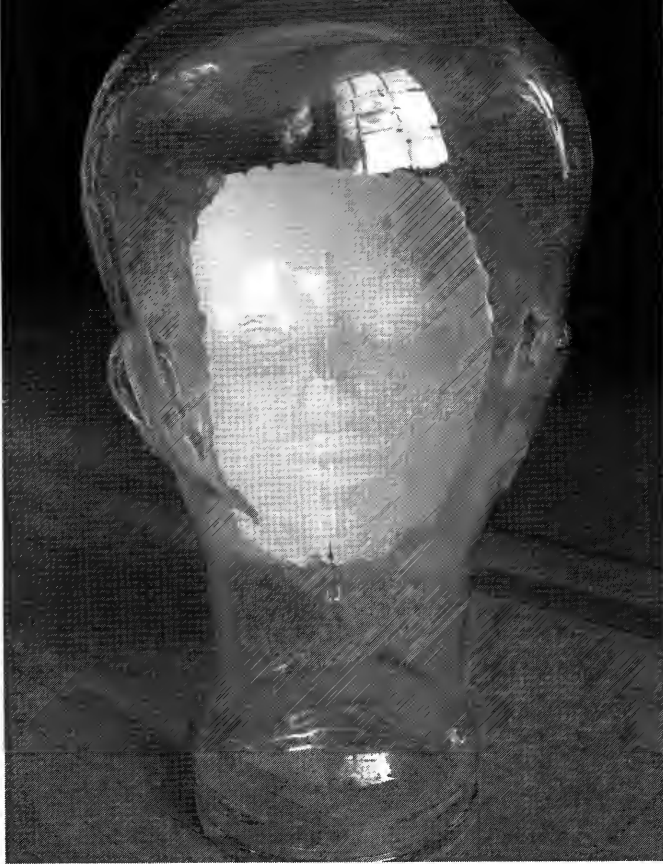
HUGH BRAMLETT

It is among the ten
where I slit with the sun.
I borrow some thoughts
and watch fingers

of the sea turn pages
of deep, one by one.
Palms lean themselves
In consent, en masse -

as crowned kings
ruling over red pigeons
and busy leagues
of young seagulls,

that pick through
a tingy wash
of foam and shell,
as if to jot their words.



SUBCONSCIOUS SABRINA MENDOZA

Google Fiber Comes to Big Bend

EVAN HINTON

The steam drill gives a distant whisper
in the ear of John Henry
from several paces behind.
Now, feeling
the livelihood of his fellow men,
heavy in his hands,
John Henry lays his hammer down,
lets his head fall.
A gunny sack holds the weight of his world.
Now, awoken
Death's rattle gives way
to a purring in his ear,
56 kilobaud per second.

He lays his tracks
firm in the ground,
only to find
the will of curiosity
supplanted.
The new machine,
this silicon drill,
cannot taste
dirt, sweat, blood,
effort.

Kasparov blinks,
perspires,
his hands slip,
only because

he had hoped
to grasp with them,
Deep Blue will never know
a hammer's weight
in a clenched fist,
the heft of ambition,
the might of wonder,
the impact of failure.

We are outmoded,
devices
of blood and synapses,
only if,
having known these things,
we forget.

Our Dilemma

BETH T. AYERS

I refuse.
 I have no intention
 Of rendering an opinion.
 I am neutral and so will I remain.
 The rest of you may debate
 Till the cows come home,
 But I will not take part.
 I haven't the heart
 For debate,
 For negotiation,
 For counting pros and cons.
 I am a follower,
 Not a leader,
 Not when it comes to this.
 One suggestion
 Knocked out by another.
 That possibility
 Destroyed by a third,
 Only then to be eliminated,
 Forcing your return
 Back to square one and
 My patience is wearing thin.
 I don't want to jump in
 But I see no end...
 "Enough! I'm going to ...
 Chili's. You can come or stay home.
 Peanut butter's in the pantry."

One Extra Chromosome

NATE MATHERS

I can feel them, the judgmental eyes.
 Creeping up on my aching shoulders
 Just like the crimson fire ants
 Swarm a helpless shred of food.

He didn't have a choice to be different from the rest of us,
 God didn't give him the say in how he must be created.
 The great ones in the sky flipped a coin,
 And sometimes we become a wonder of the world.

Through the radiance of such a blessing,
 the iron fist of the world can learn to be compassionate.
 Love, happiness, embracing the joys of life,
 the world could be a much simpler place.

He is no different than you and me.
 Open up your heart, not all people are the same,
 yet you will always find surprises around the corner.
 So what if he has one more chromosome than you and I?

Max's Sofa

EVAN HINTON

**This poem is a tribute to Kenneth C. Knowlton and
Leon Harmon's print "Studies in Perception I" [1966]*

Every photon from
Max's sofa
through the lens,
past the shutter,
inspires a little
bit of silver halide
to speak the least
about a dancer's repose.

Ken 'n Leon
take one glance,
'hand it off,
Bela 'n Mike
toss it off,
the drum scanner
looks her up,
down,
side to side.

This task,
more than one
mind can hold,
relies on hatch marks,
each hand
unknowingly
carries a fraction
of an intangible muse.

Ferrous oxides dance
they hear
a resistance ladder's
vague flattery,
values become halftones.

Even Seurat
woulda laughed,
sometimes
our conceits of intent
can only fail,
as God's naive gaze
makes our motions bent,
we are all blind
when impetus prevails.

Now as she rests,
here in Ed's basement,
black and white
on every breakfast table
outside of Murray Hill,
perception prevails
as words become her,
pornography succumbs
to the zeitgeist's will.

Gluttony

JESSIE MANN

My intestines burn, vomit leaks
from my throat as if from a rusty pipe.
I purge out my desires, salvaging my figure.

My body is a computer slowly being
broken down by viruses because of my habits.

I promise my rotting organ this is it,
no more.

But then I come across a table of croissants.
Light and buttery, rivers of smooth milky
chocolate
flowed from within.

My hand gently touches my belly like
a pregnant woman over her unborn child.
Soon, I know, I will put my poor stomach
through the same torture, yet again.

Men Walk on the Moon

TAUREAN HILL

Firefly filled mason jars pave way
for the freshly squeezed childhood dreams,
held tightly in a charcoal skillet.
Rumble starts in their stomach today.

Syrup waltz on a cratered pancake,
as not to disturb her gentle grace.
Yet we devalue for what she stands using
fork and knife to claim her untouched face.

Egons Ago

KATIE LIPSCOMB

This is the shape of sadness.
A loss of what was
A lazy charcoal outline
of a dream
that was once avant-garde.

Who cares?

I'm skeletal mass
seeking abominable bliss

a coffee shop has-been

a collar bone soul.



BANNISTER #8 SABRINA MENDOZA



The Abuse

NATALIE GREENE

What you ask of me is hard
 Unearth memories dormant in a quagmire of forgiveness
 But that's alright I don't mind
 God has endowed me with strength to face my giants
 They are grasshoppers now

You wanted to hear the gory details
 Will another potential victim be spared if secrets are revealed?
 The sleepless nights... tomorrow will I taste your dew?
 The worrying days... unborn babe will your footsteps be etched?
 Or will your fate be determined by one blow to my womb?

Oh battered body continually tossed against this brick wall
 Do you have the strength to rescue my sleeping tots
 Isolation, depression, and fear, why did you befriend me here?
 Intimate partner violence
 Preventable public health problem

The struggle is over
 My mourning turned into dancing
 Yet still I grieve for those left behind
 Hoping that their morning will dawn

The Screamer

ALEJANDRO MOLINA

In twilight—I live alone,
 Never ending, never seeing day or night
 All—life, and sky, and land, and seas—twisted
 My whole body—swagger—crawling like a snake
 My scream—peels you away

Nightmare

FAIZAH

I slept on a soft bed,
covered with a fluffy, puffy blanket...
sweating so badly, my
heart had become tight
and wouldn't pump.
I had a hard time
breathing and had
problems with my lungs
they caught as the
fire of smoke filled
them, my nose could smell it.
It attacked my lungs
and heart, they
became dark and
burned...
I tried to wake up
but my eyes were still
closed as it locked
together, I rolled
over the bed, sweating
I didn't know what time
it was, my eyes were
dark, I couldn't see...
My mind started...
Image appeared in the dark
And all I could see was
scary woods, no
leaves, it was kind
of Halloween...
I was lonely, I felt
like I was inside
of a box...
I tried to be brave

and not to get scared as a black cat...
My lungs ached so badly...
I walked on the path to get out of the woods
and there was a path
that looked like a letter "V",
two different signs,
one sign had a left arrow...
And the other a right arrow...
I decided to go on to the right path,
when I got there,
it started smoking,
I tried to protect my nose
from the scent, I held my breath,
I had five minutes
until my lungs would stop...
I hurried to get out to the woods and saw...
there was a light,
I tried to walk really fast
but my lungs caught the smoke
and that stopped pumping,
I didn't feel well and I fell down
on the ground, I was dying...
the smoke covered me, crackled like an evil,
the fire pulled me down,
my body fell down and
there were lots of sharp things
like ice popsicle. I was dead.
I suddenly woke up in pain,
because of my aching lungs
and struggle for breath...
It was 3 a.m....

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